

China prepares to grow vegetables on Mars

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A NASA colour image of the surface of Mars taken August 23 by the rover Curiosity. Chinese astronauts are preparing to grow fresh vegetables on Mars and the moon after researchers successfully completed a preliminary test in Beijing, state media reported.

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Four kinds of vegetables were grown in an "ecological life support system", a 300 cubic metre cabin which will allow astronauts to develop their own stocks of air, water and food while on [space missions](#), [Xinhua news agency](#) said Monday.

The system, which relies on plants and algae, is "expected to be used in extra-terrestrial bases on the moon or Mars", the report said.

Participants in the experiment could "harvest fresh vegetables for meals", Xinhua quoted Deng Yibing, a researcher at Beijing's Chinese Astronaut Research and Training Centre, as saying.

"Chinese astronauts may get fresh vegetables and oxygen supplies by gardening in extra-terrestrial bases in the future," the report said, adding that the experiment was the first of its kind in China.

China has said it will land an exploratory craft on the moon for the first time next year, as part of an ambitious [space](#) programme that includes a long-term plan for a manned moon landing.

The Asian superpower has been ramping up its manned space activities as the United States, long the leader in the field, has scaled back some of its programmes, such as retiring its iconic space shuttle fleet.

In its last white paper on space, China said it was working towards landing a man on the moon—a feat so far only achieved by the United States, most recently in 1972—although it did not give a time frame.

China's first astronaut Yang Liwei said last month that [Chinese astronauts](#) may start a branch of China's ruling Communist Party in space, state media reported.

"If we establish a party branch in space, it would also be the 'highest' of

its kind in the world," Xinhua quoted Yang as saying.

The astronaut was launched into space and orbited the earth aboard the Shenzhou 5 spacecraft in 2003.

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